

Talking Points for the ADDI  
Status of the Iran-Iraq War  
17 March 1986

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There has been no significant change in the battle lines near Al Faw or in Iraqi Kurdistan over the past week. Baghdad's continued cautious approach limits its chances for breaking the stalemate and allows Tehran to retain the initiative.

- Iraq is relying primarily on artillery and airstrikes to weaken Iranian positions around Al Faw, and Baghdad has improved its position only marginally. Baghdad is afraid of overcommitting its forces while the threat of an Iranian attack elsewhere is present.
- Iran continues to ferry men and equipment--including artillery--across the Shatt al Arab to resupply its position around Al Faw.
- It also has sent additional brigades to the fighting in the north--probably to prevent Iraq from recapturing lost territory. Iraq recovered one position last week.
- In the past week there has been increasing Iranian activity in the Hawizah Marsh and opposite Al Basrah.

Baghdad's use of chemical weapons has declined since it contained the Iranian attacks, a development that is in keeping with Iraq's defensive war strategy.

- Iraq's use of chemical weapons against the Iranians has had only limited effect. The amount of chemicals used has been too small to effectively contaminate the battle area given its size, the marshy terrain and rainy weather. Also, Iran has improved its defensive measures.
- The publicity of being blamed by a UN commission for using chemicals will not deter Baghdad. Meanwhile, Iran continues to threaten retaliation with its own chemical weapons.

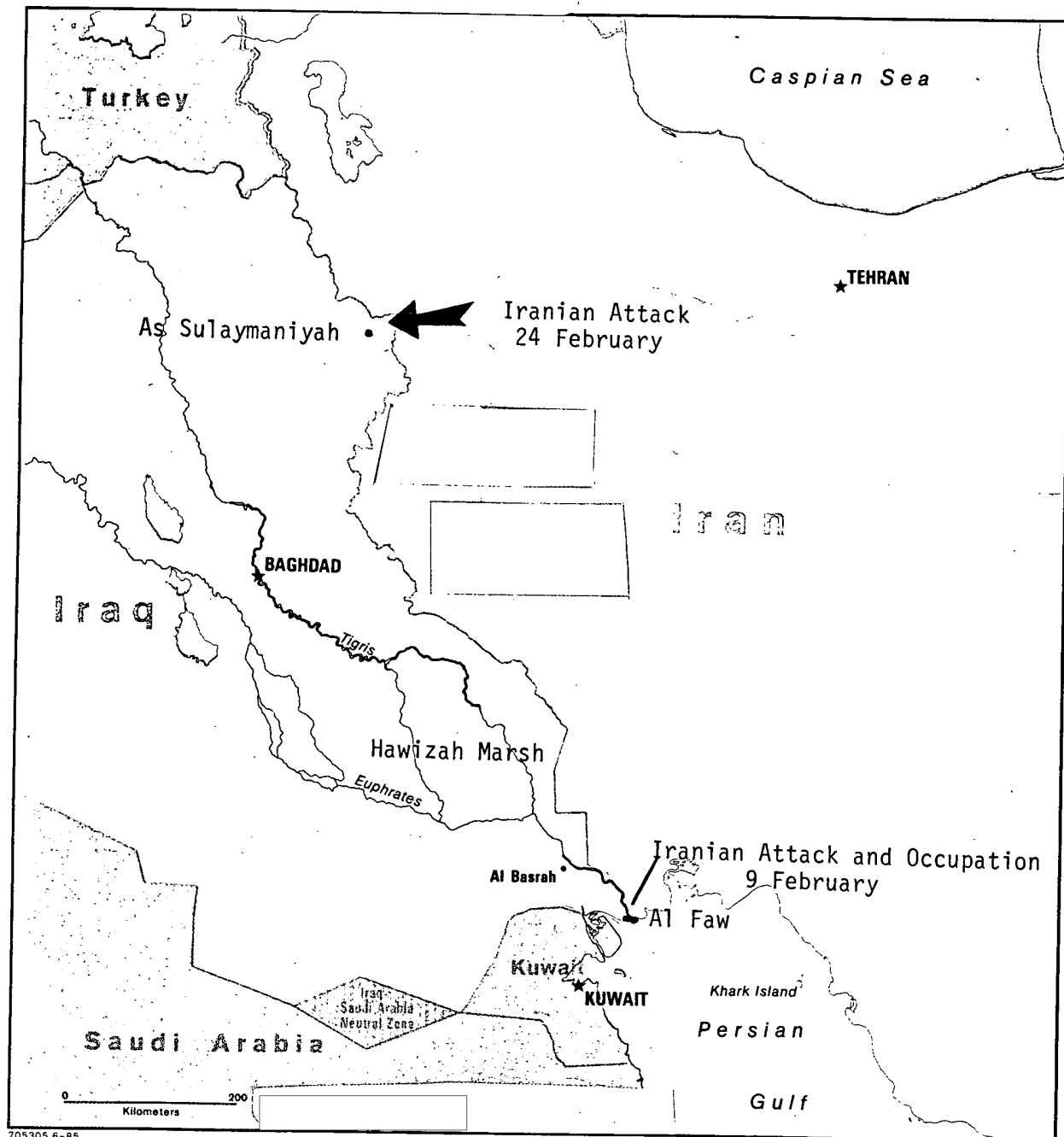
Baghdad's options are limited by political and military costs. It will not try to recapture Al Faw in the near future but probably will increase its air attacks on military and economic targets in Iran's interior.

Iran's opportunity to exploit its success at Al Faw is constrained by time and economics.

- In order for another sizable attack to have a chance of succeeding, Iran must act before Iraq restores its reserves and Tehran's capacity to support another offensive is expended at Al Faw.
- If Tehran hopes to continue a war of attrition to undermine Baghdad, it probably has only a few months to show results before war weariness begins to rise again in Iran.

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